

**Opening Statement of Rep. Bob Clement  
House Budget Committee – Secretary Paige  
March 13, 2001**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for yielding to me. Good morning and welcome to the Budget Committee, Mr. Secretary. Secretary Paige – congratulations on your new position. I can appreciate what you're going through in transitioning from an educational setting to Washington; I was a college president before I came to Congress. But I can tell you this – being a college president was a lot harder than this job, at least most of the time!

As a former educator, current co-chair of the House Education caucus and parent of two daughters who have always gone to public schools, I am extremely concerned about the status of our schools. I have always been a strong believer in our public school systems. Improving the public schools in this country needs to be our top priority. Simply put, schools should be free from drugs and violence and an environment rich in learning and educational excellence. We need adequate facilities, books and teachers both qualified and dedicated. Research shows what parents already know – students learn best when they are in safe, modern schools with smaller classes and 21<sup>st</sup> century technology. The federal government has a responsibility to provide states and localities with financial assistance for education. If we are to continue to prosper economically and as a democracy, America must have an education policy that provides opportunities for all of our children to succeed.

Recently, a lot of attention has been given to the quality of our public schools themselves. Simply put, we cannot expect our children to get a 21<sup>st</sup> century education if their school buildings are outdated, ill-equipped, and falling apart. I have visited numerous schools in my district and seen for myself the poor conditions our teachers and students are forced to suffer through – no air conditioning, asbestos, closets converted to classrooms, outdated technology, and shared facilities and resources. We must do better. I'm deeply concerned to see that the President's budget framework guts school renovation and construction funding. I would encourage this Administration to continue to push for significant funding specifically for school construction and renovation projects.

Being from Nashville, Tennessee, music has always had a special place in my heart. I have been a longtime supporter and proponent of music education. Research has shown that involvement in music programs improves a child's early cognitive development, basic math and reading abilities, self-esteem, SAT scores, self-discipline, ability to work in teams, spatial reasoning skills, and school attendance. Also, children involved with music education are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, and less likely to be involved with gangs and substance abuse. The study of music and the other arts also provides students with a sense of their cultural heritage. Later this week I will be hosting the first Education Caucus briefing of the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress with my colleague, Mr. Roy Blunt, on music education. We're going to hear from some experts as well as some students about the importance of music education. I would encourage both the Administration and this Committee to support continued research into music education as well as programs that promote music education in our schools. Just as we would not think to cut math or science from our curricula, we must not cut music education.

I am also very pleased to see President Bush recognize the importance of character education in his recent address to Congress. Americans are concerned about the steady decline of our nation's core ethical values, especially among our children. Parents should be the primary developers of character, but the role of education in character-building has become increasingly important. Schools across the country have begun to incorporate character education in their curriculum in a variety of ways and are achieving real results, including improved school climate, fewer behavior problems and even higher test scores. Congressman Lamar Smith, of Texas, and I have introduced H.R. 613, the Character Learning and Student Success (CLASS) Act. Character education has become a national priority in the education reform debate. I believe that the CLASS Act will bring national attention to the importance and effectiveness of character education and will help schools create positive learning environments. I would hope that the Administration would include the CLASS Act in any character education initiative proposed.

As a former college president and parent of one child in college and another set to begin in the fall, I know how important federal financial aid can be. The demands of technology and the global economy are reflecting the importance of a college education. All too often, the cost of higher education has been a deterrent to many who wish to continue their education. We cannot afford to let higher education be out of reach of those students who have the desire to further their education. No student, regardless of socio-economic background, should be deprived of something as priceless as an education. Federal financial aid programs need to be adequately funded to help all of our students continue their education. Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Pell Grants, federal work-study, Perkins loans, and graduate education programs all need to be funded at higher levels. These are all worthy programs that make a real difference in students' lives.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me the opportunity to highlight some of my priorities in education funding this year. I think we can all agree that education is of the utmost importance not only to this Committee and this Congress but also to the American people. I look forward to working with Secretary Paige to support educational policies and programs that benefit all of our students. I yield back the balance of my time.